STATE OF UTAH GENERAL OUTLOOK
Mar 1, 2006

SUMMARY
In Utah, it seems as though all you have to do is mention the possibility of a poor month and bang, there it happens. February, while not the lowest accumulation on record, certainly was a contrast to the weather patterns experienced in January. Bright, sunny days while so enjoyable, just don't add to snowpacks. One consistent thing about the weather patterns of 2006 that continued in February is that the north received more precipitation and snowpack accumulation than did the south. However, the entire state was a little on the dry side this February which means that snowpacks went from the 120%-145% range down to the 100%-120% range in the north. In southwestern Utah, snowpacks are now at 44% of average. As poor as that is, in some areas of southeastern Utah such as the Abajo Mountains, snowpacks are only a miniscule 22% of average, bouncing off the record lows for the area. Many areas below 8000 feet elevation on the Sevier, Virgin and southeastern Utah have melted out or have extremely low snowpacks. Snowpack accumulation in February ranged from a paltry 18% over southwest Utah to between 62% and 72% in the northern areas. The Bear River Basin is now slightly above its normal April 1 value and both the Weber and Provo watersheds are very close to that value as well. A good March accumulation will put these areas into excellent water supply conditions. Southern Utah in not nearly as likely to have such an outcome as on the Virgin which needs almost 550% of average in March to get back to normal and there is only a 26% chance of actually getting that kind of accumulation. Soil moisture values in water producing areas are much less than last year statewide but more so in the south. The Virgin has only half the soil moisture of last year. This could have a significant impact on spring runoff, particularly in the south. Overall, soil moisture values range from 12% on the Escalante to 58% of saturation in the upper 24 inches of soil on the Bear River. Precipitation for February was much below normal at 65%. This brings the seasonal precipitation, (Oct-Feb) to 104%. Low reservoir storage is becoming less of a concern with total reservoir storage at 68% of capacity, up 23% from last year. The area of greatest drought concern is rapidly becoming most of southeastern and southwestern Utah. In particular, the Monticello area could be hard hit with forecast streamflow in the 5% to 10% range. The Bear River basin has relatively poor reservoir storage but otherwise decent streamflow prospects. In general, most areas of the state have excellent reservoir carryover. General water supply conditions are near average and have been improving over the past year with the exception of southwestern and southeastern Utah. Streamflow forecasts range from 6% to 129% of average. Surface Water Supply Indices range from 21% on the Bear River, to 88% on the Provo.

SNOWPACK
March first snowpacks as measured by the NRCS SNOTEL system range from 44% in southwest Utah to 121% on the Bear River Watershed. In select areas of southeastern Utah, snowpacks are as low as 22% of average. Northern snowpacks are similar or in the case of the Bear, higher than last year. Low elevation snowpacks are below normal except in the north. With only one month of accumulation left, northern Utah appears to be in good shape with 80 to 90% probability of at least average conditions and the Sevier, southeastern and southwestern Utah need 180% to 546% of average accumulation to reach normal.

PRECIPITATION
Mountain precipitation during February was only 65% of average statewide. Precipitation was lower in southern Utah (48%) and much higher in the north (71%). This brings the seasonal accumulation (Oct-Feb) to 104% of average statewide. A dry fall and early winter has reduced soil moisture values considerably and this could negatively impact spring runoff.

RESERVOIRS

Storage in 41 of Utah's key irrigation reservoirs is at 68% of capacity. This is an increase of 23% from last year. Reservoirs across the State have been making steady gains in storage. Bear Lake really is the last reservoir to remain in an extremely low condition due to the prolonged drought.

STREAMFLOW

Snowmelt streamflows are expected to be much below average to above average across the state of Utah this year. Forecast streamflows range from 6% on Recapture Creek near Blanding to 129% of average for Wheeler Creek on the Ogden Basin. Most flows are forecast to be in the 60% to 110% range. Overall water supply conditions are improving in the north and declining in the south.